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CREP Forum 2001 Summary

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Forum 2001 was held June 10-13 in St. Michaels, Maryland. This was the second annual forum on CREP, and was meant to provide a format to discuss current and future issues related to individual CREPs, and to the CREP and CRP programs in general. More than 120 people attended the conference, representing federal, state and private interests in the 15 CREP states and 16 other states.

Sunday featured registration and a welcoming reception hosted by Ducks Unlimited and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Monday's session focused on presentations by representatives from each of the states that have a CREP program in effect. Day one also featured an address by U.S. Representative Wayne Gilchrest of Maryland, who gave his insights about the upcoming Farm Bill and its probable effects on the CREP program. Monday's activities concluded with a field tour of a local farm and a dinner tour of the Miles River onboard the cruise ship "Patriot."

Tuesday was led off by representatives from nongovernmental organization CREP partners Ducks Unlimited, Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Quail Unlimited. FSA's Dann Stuart and Jerome Uher of Widmeyer Communications previewed new brochures and booklets on CREP and CRP that are being produced, and displayed a new CREP videotape and power point presentation that field staff can begin to use immediately.

A panel featuring FSA's Mike Linsenbigler and Patty Engler of NRCS discussed technical issues including support and change requests. Tuesday's session concluded with a discussion of the 2002 Farm Bill by FSA, NRCS and conservation partners. The best information currently available seems to indicate that CRP and CREP will be reauthorized in the Farm Bill and will be allocated increases in acreage and funding.

On Wednesday, a discussion was held on the location for the 2002 forum. It was generally agreed that Illinois would be the ideal CREP to host next year's forum. The Illinois contingent agreed to meet with decision makers back in the state to see if that would be possible. The Pennsylvania CREP volunteered to host the forum if Illinois cannot.

Conference attendees were encouraged to participate in the ongoing CREP conference calls, to contribute items to the CREP e-mail newsletter, and to share information to the extent possible.

It was decided that the forum develop and agree upon a list of requests for improving the CREP program that states should use in writing to members of Congress who are shaping the Farm Bill and to the Administration. A list was developed and approved by the forum.

Opening Comments and Introduction

Maryland Secretary of Natural Resources Sarah Taylor-Rogers welcomed everyone to the conference and thanked the conference sponsors. The sponsors included BASF, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Monsanto, Quail Unlimited and Southern States Cooperative.

State Reports

Jeff Horan of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources outlined the conference's objectives. "We felt the best way for everyone to understand what we want to protect is to bring you out to the bay and show you. Maryland was the first state to take part in CREP and we are interested in seeing it reauthorized in the Farm Bill so we can get to 100,000 acres. We had another challenge and that was a state goal of enrolling 600 miles of streams in buffers, and because of CREP, we now have enrolled 486 miles of riparian buffer. That is due in a large part to CREP. CREP is effective in Maryland."

Horan acknowledged special guests who are attending and the sponsors of the meeting. Horan noted that the morning session was about learning from each other and for focusing on the unique ideas that are coming from the state CREPs.

MARYLAND

Bebe Shortall, Maryland FSA Conservation Program Specialist, then gave a presentation on the Maryland CREP.



MD_CONFppt.ppt

VIRGINIA

Gary Moore from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, gave the following presentation on the Virginia CREP.



'Virginia01 CREP
Forum.ppt

OHIO

Christopher Gibbs from FSA presented the Ohio CREP.





OhioCREPpresentation
.ppt

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina's CREP report was given by David Williams of the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources.



nccrep pptfinal.ppt

WASHINGTON

Debbie Becker from the Washington State Conservation Commission reported on the Washington CREP.



wa_2001 Natl Conf.ppt

DELAWARE

Nancy Goggin, from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control reported on the Delaware CREP.



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MINNESOTA

A report on the Minnesota CREP was presented by Kevin Lines of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.



MN_CREP..ppt

MICHIGAN

Dale Allen of FSA and Chris Savona from the Michigan Department of Agriculture gave the report on the Michigan CREP.



MI pwrpt
presentation.ppt



NEW YORK

The New York CREP report was presented by Julian Drelich of NRCS.



CREP - New York.ppt

ILLINOIS

Rick Mollahan of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources reported on the Illinois CREP.



IllCREP.ppt

PENNSYLVANIA

The Pennsylvania CREP report was presented by Scott Klinger of the Pennsylvania State Game Commission.



Pennsylvania CREP
Forum 2001.p...

OREGON

Oregon's presentation was delivered by FSA's Fred Ringer.



OR presentation Part
1.ppt



OR presentation Part
2.ppt



OR presentation Part
3.ppt

NORTH DAKOTA

Jim Jost of FSA and Ted Upgren with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department gave a presentation on the North Dakota CREP.



CREP ND.ppt

MISSOURI

Gary Baclesse with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources completed the state presentations with a report on the Missouri CREP



MoCREP show.ppt



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A question and answer session followed the reports.

Q. (from a Michigan representative): What can be done about the negotiation of an agreement? We don't have our practices limitations how we want them and would have changed.

A. (Mike Linsenbigler, FSA): We can always renegotiate. Maryland has made a habit of it.

A. (Ohio rep) We have also renegotiated items.

Q: (Delaware rep): What are states getting/contributing to costs of tree sheilds/shelters?

A: (Washington state rep): The state picks up costs over what FSA won't cover.

A: (New York rep): FSA and Ag share costs on 50/50 basis.

Q: (Michigan rep): How does Illinois' system incentivize local districts' work?

A: (Illinois rep): All SWCDs hold the easements with the county, local attorneys and title companies do the work writing up the easements. We pay the SWCDs 14 percent, up to \$4,800 on each easement enrollment. Each district may then choose to offer all or part of that to employees. We don't have a legislator who doesn't like the structure, because money is going into the community – to the farmer, to the title attorney, to employees, etc.

Q: (Maryland rep): There is no such incentive here and it is an incredible burden on local districts because there is much more paperwork beyond just signup when you get to easements. How does Illinois handle the workload?

A: (Illinois rep): It varies from district to district. We have training and diskette templates of the documents needed. We have found that the clerical staff are the most capable to deal with this. There is always some kind of a twist on individual easements, so we offer support and answer questions at the state level.

(Maryland rep): Easements have driven our program's enrollment.

(North Carolina rep): SWCD are getting the word out. Attorneys have to do the work at the state level and it has been a burden. Maybe we could incentivize owners to present us with clean titles? These (title issues) are tough issues to resolve.

(North Dakota rep): We pick up the cost of abstract fees, so the landowner presents us with the abstract.

Q: (US Forest Service rep): Is North Dakota the only state that allows public access to CREP lands?

A: (Illinois rep): The landowner maintains the right.

(Pennsylvania rep): It's not required in CREP, but our state programs include public access.

(North Dakota rep): We have to return the benefits of CREP to the public and we do that through public access. Our constituents are hunters and fishers.

Q: (Delaware rep): Where does the liability fall on public access?

A: (North Dakota rep): Unless you charge an entry fee, you are not liable in North Dakota.



Q: (US Forest Service rep): CREP could lead to a number of small easements scattered about in the long term. What happens to prevent that?

A: (Maryland rep): Many folks in our easement program work with other easement programs as well.

Q: (Wildlife Mgt. Institute rep): Is FSA's response to state concerns getting better?

A: (Maryland rep) Now that there is a track record, FSA has loosened up their approach. Much easier now working with Washington.

(Pennsylvania rep) Two years ago it took us two years to get a CREP through. Now it takes only about 2 months to make a change. We now understand what they are looking for.

(Illinois rep) We've not had any problems from the beginning.

Q: (Wildlife Mgt. Institute rep) The administration/Congress are looking at what decisions can be made locally. Is CREP the way to do this, or is an EQIP type model better?

(Ohio rep) CREP is a locally controlled program. The only thing that Washington said about CREP is CRP eligibility, and you do the rest.

(Oklahoma rep) Total local control may not be the best thing. We have a lot of factions that can swing the two thirds of the vote to get most anything approved.

(Oregon rep) Nothing is worse than EQIP to administer. We're in a real hurt if we have to follow that model—a lot of time wasted there administratively.

Congress and the 2002 Farm Bill

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE WAYNE GILCHREST

U.S. Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) addressed the conference on the 2002 Farm Bill. Below is a summary of his comments.

Agriculture is as important as our national defense. I say it and our new President has said it. The US has been the greatest country in the world for three reasons:

1. Democracy
2. An abundance of natural resources
3. An endless frontier

The endless frontier is gone and our resources diminished, but our democracy provides us the opportunity to retain our resources. Our intellectual capacity is the most important thing toward sustaining ourselves on this ever diminishing planet.

The last farm bill was created under a concept of "let the market take care of agriculture." But agriculture is not like any other industry. Agriculture depends on natural processes, like the weather. We thought we could wean ourselves from government subsidies, that wasn't the case. Some want to protect the family farm, others see it as inefficient.



The conservation title of the farm bill is about to expire.

Here's what I see happening:

CRP: The current ceiling of 36.4 million acres is likely to be increased to 45 million.

CREP: Likely to be reauthorized and get a large infusion of cash. Most other conservation measures in the farm bill may be redesigned. Early discussion about CREP was about the acreage being signed up. But I believe that 27,000 acres in Maryland is a good figure, especially with the signup rate accelerating.

The House Ag Chairman informs me that the committee will draft a farm bill this month and hold hearings in July. In August they will vote the bill out of committee and bring it to the House floor in September. Senator Harkin is not in any hurry to start. In January or so the Senate will move. A House/Senate conference to finalize the farm bill should be expected around September 2002.

I don't believe there will be much change in the conservation titles. Most likely there will be enhancement of each of the existing programs with more money. The GOP is shifting into the conservation arena. The farmer is going to need a hand to create buffers.

There are two bills to watch.

Representative Thune's (SD) Conservation Security Act. This bill provides \$8-9 billion in conservation programs. It states that if you use Best Management Practices, you don't need to take so much land out of production and you will still receive payments.

Representative Kind's (WI) bill will provide increased money to each existing program and expand the programs to handle manure re-use.

Both bills are expected to be voted out of the Ag committee in September. I am supporting Kind's bill.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Q: Rep. Sherry Boehlert (NY) says the Northeast needs to get its fair share in the farm bill. What about Maryland's fair share?

A: We have to work for our fair share. You have to engage other members. We want to get a better allocation. CREP will help Maryland and we'd like to get to 100,000 acres.

Q: There is a staffing shortfall. How do you see Congress passing this increase but not providing the staffing to implement it?

A: There is a movement that we have cut too much and there will be a push for more people in FSA and NRCS.



- Q: Representative Lucas (OK) at a recent hearing on conservation partnerships said 10 percent of farms get most of the payments. Any chance of a means test being implemented for price support payments?
- A: I don't know if a means test would go over well. Members of the committee mostly represent "big farm" states. The market orientation movement is still alive and they believe the small family farm is a thing of the past.
- Q: 65 percent of cropland in Maryland is leased by tenant farmers. Tenant farmers don't necessarily benefit from CREP. Are there any creative solutions to this?
- A: It takes 800 acres or more to make it (profitable) in Maryland. Landowners benefit most from CREP and I know this. But there is no real answer yet.
- Q: How do you sell CREP to urban members of Congress?
- A: Most urban members have little knowledge of agriculture. But you should respect the knowledge they have and take the time to share your knowledge.
- Q: Will the free market member cause any major changes of CREP and CRP?
- A: My sense is they will be fine tuned, but receive more money. But you should still be wary. Folks like John Boehner (OH) would like to see all the farm conservation programs go away.

Field Tour

Patty Engler from Maryland NRCS then led a field tour to the 290-acre San Souci Farm in Talbot County. Afterward, Forum participants took a dinner tour of the Miles River aboard the *Patriot*.

Tuesday's Opening Remarks

Hagner Mister, Secretary, MD Department of Agriculture, opened Tuesday's session with remarks about Maryland's agricultural future. A summary of his remarks follows:

Maryland's future depends on a continuing agriculture industry, and that's tough because of several factors, including environmental concerns and commodity prices. "I believe the two 'E's have to exist – that's the environment and the economy -- both of them have to work."

Flexibility is key to a good program, it must include choices for landowners. Farmers need options and I think this CREP program is full of options.



CREP is a program with incentives that should encourage more farmers to participate. We must be diligent, offer programs that address public concern for the environment. People are very interested in what's happening on our land, and there is an imperative to do a good job.

The conservation movement started around 1935 with Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and farmers have done a tremendous job over the years in protecting our natural resources. But that's not to say we couldn't do more.

Talking CREP From a National Perspective

Royden Powell III of the Maryland Department of Agriculture moderated a panel of nongovernmental organization representatives who spoke on the value of local partnerships.

BILL STREET, CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Mr. Street's outline of his remarks follows:

CREP Conference

Chesapeake Bay Foundation Presentation

Bill Street

June 12, 2001

- I. Introduction to CBF
 - A. Private, non-profit dedicated to the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed
 - B. 80,000 members, Offices in MD, VA, and PA – largest regional environmental group in the nation
 - C. 3 Program areas:
 - 1. Environmental Education – 37,000 students annually
 - 2. Resource Protection – advocate for any issue that affects the Bay from land use, to water quality permits, to fisheries
 - 3. Habitat Restoration – from the headwaters to the Mainstem of the Bay
 - a. Riparian buffers
 - b. Wetland Restoration
 - c. Underwater Grasses
 - d. Oysters
- II. Importance of CREP to the Bay and CBF
 - A. CREP has been the greatest boost to restoration in the Bay watershed of any single program
 - B. Why is CREP so important to the Bay
 - C. Bay Watershed
 - 1. Cooperstown, NY
 - Norfolk, Virginia



- Franklin, West Virginia
 - 2. 6 states
 - 3. 64,000 square miles
 - D. Bay Proper
 - 1. 7,000 square miles of tidal water
 - 2. Average Depth = 21 feet
 - 3. 20% less than 6 feet deep
 - E. Watershed area: water volume 2700:1, 10 times higher than most of the world's coastal waters
 - F. Therefore, Bay is the smallest estuary in the world and most vulnerable
 - G. Source of Pollution
 - 1. 2/3 from Non-point sources
 - 2. Majority from Agriculture
 - H. Buffers, Wetlands, Sensitive lands most effective means to treat runoff
 - I. CREP is the vehicle to make that possible
 - J.
- II. Partnerships
- A. CREP has made unprecedented resources available
 - 1. \$1/2 Billion in Bay watershed
 - 2. Attracts landowners that otherwise would not be interested
 - 3. Success of CREP is more than funding – Partnerships
 - a. FSA, NRCS, State agencies, Conservation Districts, CBF, DU, QU, local watershed groups, local land trusts
 - b. Everyone contributes something to make CREP the flagship program in conservation
 - c. Never been done before with a Farm Bill Program
 - d. Partnership in:
 - 1. Program Development
 - 2. Approval
 - 3. Funding
 - 4. Marketing
 - 5. Implementation
 - 6. Breaking Bottlenecks
- III. Keys to Success
- A. Delivery Mechanisms – critical to achieving goals
 - 1. Targeted Practices –
 - a. Not just going for large acreage
 - b. Targeting practices and areas that are most effective for water quality and wildlife
 - 2. Farm size is small - ~ 120 acres average
 - 3. Therefore, contracts and practices are small (~10-15 acres)
 - 4. Labor Intensive



- 5. Need adequate delivery mechanisms and streamlined process
 - B. Institutional Commitment at all levels
 - 1. Many examples of a single field person making a difference
 - a. Chester County, PA – 13 mos., 22 miles, 84 acres of wetlands
 - b. Augusta County, VA – Almost 20% of CREP acreage in 31 county CREP area
 - 2. Only way to get consistent commitment in the field is with commitment at the Top
 - C. 100% Cost Share
 - 1. MD CREP
 - 2. VA and PA CREP
 - D. Comprehensive Marketing Efforts
 - 1. Future Harvest –
 - a. survey
 - b. marketing materials
 - c. newspaper and radio ads
 - d. toll free buffer hotline – 1-877-4Buffer
 - e. hundreds of respondents
 - 2. CBF Full Page Ad in Lancaster Farmer
 - E. Adequate Incentives that reflect all economic considerations
 - 1. Signup is greatest where soil rental rates are good and development pressure is low
 - 2. Signup is poor in the opposite
 - F. Adaptive Management
 - 1. Buzz word in natural resource management, also needs to be in program management
 - 2. Good communication – particularly in the beginning
 - 3. Anticipate that changes will be needed
- IV. Conclusions
- A. CREP has been a large success in increasing restoration in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed
 - B. However, current programs are just beginning and are just the beginning of what is needed to reach Chesapeake 2000
 - a. 2010 mile forested riparian goal
 - b. 25,000 acre wetland goal
 - c. De-listing the Bay for nutrients and sediments
 - 1. ~1.5 million acres of riparian buffers and wetlands
 - C. Future of CREP and Farm Bill
 - 1. Reauthorize and increase CREP
 - a. Just getting programs started
 - b. Need to maintain commitment
 - c. Need to achieve larger goals
 - d. CREP is not the entire answer – need other programs



2. Adequate Delivery Mechanisms
 - a. Limiting Factor
 - b. Staff or contract
 - c. Allowance for the role of private groups
3. Address True Economic Considerations
 - a. Easements
 - 1 Addresses development value
 - 2 Justifies increased cost
 - 3 Provides income to farmer without giving up entire nest egg
 - 4 Areas often not-developable anyway
 - 5 Specific provision and goals under CREP
4. Tenant Farmers
 - a. ~60% of farmland is rented
 - b. Need to make CREP profitable for tenant farmer as well
 1. Signing Bonus
 2. Portion of Rental Rate
 3. Management of CREP areas

GUIDO TORI, DUCKS UNLIMITED

A summary of Mr. Tori's remarks appears below.

CREP helps DU meet its nonprofit mission. We have considerable resources, use us. DU involvement varies state to state. Delivery mechanisms. DU can act as a lot more than a funder. They have biologists, engineers, surveyors, agronomists, other support personnel.

CREP provides synergy from its partners that serves landowners and communities well. Employ team concept – bring all interested and potential players to the table in the beginning. Need to continue working together. For those considering CREP – encourage you to seek out and find non-governmental partners.

Farm bill reauthorization -- DU has been bringing farmers and landowners to Capitol Hill to tell their story.

I encourage you to contact DU offices. As a nonprofit, we don't have a lot of agency constraints. DU is proud to be a partner in CREP. We're ready and willing to help. Please tap us.

JIM FARMER, QUAIL UNLIMITED

A summary of Mr. Farmer's remarks:



Private organizations are really an untapped resource. You are missing the boat if you don't tap these when you go back to your home state. CREP is a great water quality program, but also the most important as a wildlife improvement program.

Got to give landowner something he wants – rental rates, economic incentives. CREP does that.

You should contact these different groups represented here and explain to them what you're trying to do. We all should be more than willing to help you.

QUESTION AND ANSWER:

Q: How well is USDA using these programs to meet Congressional mandate of '96 Farm Bill?

Street: Good targeting, in selecting most effective practices. But also a "do this everywhere" approach. Could be better targeted, identifying most need. Given it's a volunteer program, this approach is somewhat opportunistic. Biggest bang for buck. A lot of money available. As program evolves, start really targeting watershed in most need of repair. Not a shotgun approach.

Q: What are we doing about evaluation?

Street: Rely on EPA and agencies for nutrient loading info, important to continue research.

Other comments:

The tax code is another place where incentives could be generated for participation in CREP and other conservation programs.

Ducks Unlimited is hosting a conference next fall on riparian buffers in Baltimore. It should be around September 21 – 23 of 2002. We are starting to get information about it our now.

Quail Unlimited paid salaries for three part-time people in Maryland last summer-fall to process paperwork.

Marketing Tools and Communication

Dann Stuart of FSA and Jerome Uher with Widmeyer Communications presented new marketing tools available and in production. Their presentation is attached.



FSA presentation.ppt

The power point presentation tool available for CREP field staff can be found at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/crepforum/creppubdir.htm>

Technical Issues Discussion

A panel to answer questions about technical issues was held. Mike Linsenbigler of FSA and Patty Engler of NRCS led the discussion.

FSA OPENING STATEMENTS

We want to keep some consistency with CREP, but we also want to work with each CREP as much as possible to make sure the program is meeting its needs. That is a very difficult balance. The program is growing. We had 8 CREPs a year ago and now we have 15 and a backlog of 6 more states ready to sign.

Training is important for all partners, not just FSA and NRCS. It is best to put your requests to us in writing so we can have something specific to show people as we review it. We try to listen, but it's best to have it in writing.

It's important for NRCS and FSA to work together because we are all in this together. People don't see us as this agency or that agency, they see us as USDA. CREP does a good job of bringing us together through the partnership.

Data on CREP is uploaded and updated monthly for all FSA reports and are sorted by State, County and Hydraulic unit where the CREP acres are located. Technical assistance comes from CCC, NRCS, and the Forest Service. There is reimbursement, \$456/contract, which is an additional resource, but it is not enough.

NRCS OPENING STATEMENTS

Technical Assistance and staffing we know are critical issues. It is very complex and tough. Money comes in from several directions and several different projects. The public wants us accountable. We track and engage ourselves in concerns around the country. We need to know what your concerns are how they can improve the program.

In Maryland the technical committee we have set up is very helpful. It's important to have people from the field to give a scientific approach to why we want to do things a certain way.



QUESTION AND ANSWER

- Q. The Web site info for our CREP was different from our figures, why?
A. Some contracts were not loaded into the system by the county. We don't count it until an individual county loads it into our system.
- Q. When a tribe signs a CREP, who gets the payments?
A. Good question. That is a work in progress. It's part of the negotiation.
- Q. The NRCS tech money, what is it used for?
A. The money is given from CCC to NRCS at the federal level. The money doesn't nearly cover the cost of what NRCS spends to do CREP technical assistance.
- Q. Can we expect more administrative support for the program?
A. Workload analysis directs allocation of resources – and that is always one year behind.
- Q. In some states, the Fish and Wildlife Service requires Endangered Species Act consultation. Could the Feds help with compliance?
A. The Agency has asked for "safe harbor" protections for CREP, but has received no response from USFWS. States may need to get it from them themselves. FSA will continue to try.
A. If a landowner complies, they can't be accused of a "take" in Washington State.
- Q. What is NRCS doing in Maryland to support wildlife habitat?
A. NRCS supports both water quality and animals. The technical committee makes recommendations and we implement accordingly. Everything on our list of seeding recommendations benefits wildlife.
- Q. In Michigan, minimum width buffers have been installed, and now there is pressure to expand them. Has this happened in other places?
A. We would like to hear more about the specifics. But we don't see the need immediately if we are already solving the resource need with the buffer. In other cases, where a producer wants to work incrementally, that is a good thing.
- Q. Wouldn't wider strips better the wildlife habitat value?
A. True, but we also need to address the issue of time limits on adjacent strips. We could end up with an addition away from the stream in place next to a plowed up strip that has expired.
- Q. You have developed communications plans, implementation plans, etc. Is there a plan we could see on how to do a CREP proposal?
A. The best thing to do would be to consult with the 15 states that have gone through that and are in the program. There is no requirement for a pre-proposal, but some states have done one.



Comments From Maryland Directors

Maryland Directors of the USFS, FSA and NRCS made brief comments. Below is a summary of their comments.

STEVE HAINE, ACTING DIRECTOR MD FOREST SERVICE

“CREP has simply been a godsend for us.” At the time, it seemed a Herculean task, but we are very close to achieving a riparian buffer initiative we set out in 1996. The main reason we were able to achieve this was CREP.

DAVE DOSS, NRCS STATE CONSERVATIONIST

CREP is the opportunity for our farmers to treat some of their toughest environmental problems and receive sufficient incentive for that role – it’s the first program with adequate incentives.

Maryland’s leadership should be commended for its foresight.

CREP is led by locals but provides solutions to key national and state issues. Addresses the economic viability of agriculture. Single best program for farmers:

- marginal land out of production
- addresses environmental problems
- increased cash flow

We are working hard to keep one message and deliver on promises.

Common commitment is always a challenge, but it has to be there for success.

1. All partners continue to stay focused.
2. Keep up communications.
3. Effective outreach, all committed to one goal.

TOM LONG, ACTING MD FSA DIRECTOR

“We’ve broken the ground for you... hopefully what you’ve heard here is going to help when you go back to your states.”

Thanks to Bebe Shortall at FSA for her overall work and work on the Forum.

Advice: work out details up front (committees, meetings, etc.) but be flexible. Empower advisory/ steering committee and cut down on red tape. Go visit the counties, see the program in action. Clear, concise public relations, a central clearinghouse.



The 2002 Farm Bill and CREP

BOB STEVENSON, FSA

Bob Stevenson of FSA spoke on Washington DC's perspective on the Farm Bill and CREP. Here is a summary of his remarks.

I'm not ready to make statements for the administration. "It's fair to say people working on conservation are well ahead of those working on the commodity title."

We are still operating under old budgets. CREP and other programs – I'm sure they're going to be reauthorized.

The question is the amendment – increase in size, new programs. I don't see staff increases. One concept you might see more of – partnerships. If Congress doesn't extend, the agency may.

Don't sit back and carry on assuming reauthorization. We will need to prove successes to Congress and to the new Administration. We need to stress monitoring and evaluation – taxpayers are willing to fund, but will want to know what they're getting for that money. We need numbers on more than just acres.

Tax code – There is a Senate hearing this a.m., private groups only testifying, on how the tax code can be used to encourage more conservation.

Thanks to Tim Searchinger, he's the one who moved us down this road.

A publication will be released in the next few weeks with official Administration position.

MARK BERKLAND, NRCS

Mark Berkland from NRCS spoke on Washington DC's perspective on CREP. His comments are summarized.

Secretary of Agriculture doesn't refer to it as the "Farm Bill" but as Farm Policy, I will learn to do the same. Regarding farm policy, a lot of trial balloons floating up and down right now with every program.

Based on what I have heard, it appears most discussions call for reauthorization of most programs with some changes. Now this is not the administration's position, no official position has yet been released.

Budget is always a big favorite. Agriculture needs to get a fair share of surpluses. "You need to fully engage. Now is the time."



Some things I see include an increase CRP from its current 36.4 million to as many as 63 million acres. Part of that, should use for continuous sign-ups and CREP. I also have heard they may let it all go to general sign-up.

Other things to watch:

- Eliminating some of crop histories, auto extensions for tree plantings, legislative guidelines for paying and grazing.
- Increase EQIP to \$1.2 billion, with changes, de-obligated dollars.
- The Harkin Security Act.
- Awful lot of attention to existing programs with modifications.

TED BEAUVAIS, FOREST SERVICE

Ted Beauvais spoke of forestry issues that affect CREP. A summary of his remarks follows.

In 1996 there was little forestry activity in farm bill, but expecting more on private forestry in 2002.

Unlike Farm Bill programs, Forest Service programs don't expire and there is no funding cap, although that doesn't necessarily mean you get money. USFS doesn't need farm bill reauthorization. We need a private forest landowner incentive program, but we don't know exactly what shape that should be in. Cost-share for owners, farmers and ranchers is the right idea.

Another reason to support CRP: It is the single largest tree planting program ever.

Last year was a banner year for fires. We need to do more for fire prevention and treatment and that isn't going to be comprehensive of effective without work on private lands as well. Also forest and health issues must be addressed in a similar fashion. The public benefits from private land, broad societal benefits.

The Forest Service, interested in using tax incentives to further conservation. You should have a similar interest for advancing CRP and CREP.

RON HELINSKI, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

Ron Helinski spoke from his experience in lobbying on the Farm Bill. A summary of his comments follows.

Congressional representatives care most about their districts/ states. They want to know how your programs will affect them. With representatives and Senators, you are their contacts. You're responsible for educating them about CREP and you need to involve the people who are in the program and who care about the program. This includes, letters, phone calls and visits to your Representative. Assumption is death, you can not assume that your Senator or Representative knows about CRP and will support your views. If they are not hearing about it, it

is not important to them. Perception is often fact. If the media and constituents are telling the Representative the CREP is important, than CREP is important.

The key to politics is involvement. Politicians love photo opportunities and you should get them out to visit CREP and CRP sights with farmers telling them what the program is doing for them.

You have the energy and the infrastructure. What happens from this point forward is the key.

TIM SEARCHINGER, ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE

Tim Searchinger spoke on possible changes to CREP. An outline of his remarks follows.

Recommending statutory changes:

- Eligible practices for pasture land: wetlands, any native vegetation, excludes livestock
- Flash grazing for exotics control on buffers

More eligibility:

- orchards, sod, fruit & vegetables
- any CREP lands are considered priority area lands and therefore meet environmental criteria
- abolish \$50,000 cap for continuous enrollment and CREP

Related CRP changes:

- 41 – 45 million acres
- 9 million for continuous enrollment
- federal authority for easements

Implementation issues

- adequate staffing
- state must have outreach
- require simplified paperwork

Super CREP

- allow states to plan for combination of all USDA conservation programs
- similar requirements as CREP (state financial contribution, all enrollments of exceptional environmental value)

FSA “lighten up”

- more flexible on buffers and practice criteria
- extend incentives to contour and other buffer strips
- more generous payments, offer enough to meet goals

Other farm bill goals

- \$11 billion per year, ½ spending on conservation
- vastly expand EQUIP and WHIP
- new grass programs



- expand farmland preservation
- more technical assistance
- expand forestry programs

CREP states should consider drafting a joint letter with recommendations to Congress/Admin.



Wrap Up Session

On Wednesday a discussion was held on the location for the 2002 forum. It was generally agreed that Illinois would be the ideal CREP to host next year's forum. The Illinois contingent agreed to meet with decision makers back in the state to see if it would be possible. The Pennsylvania CREP volunteered to host the forum if Illinois cannot.

Conference attendees were encouraged to participate in the ongoing CREP conference calls, to contribute items to the CREP e-mail newsletter, and to share information to the extent possible.

It was decided that the forum develop a list of requests for improving the CREP program that states should use in writing to members of Congress who are shaping the Farm Bill and to the Administration. A list was developed and approved by forum.

The suggested actions were to:

- Reauthorize CREP and CRP

- Make hayland eligible

- Set aside 10 million acres for Continuous CRP and CREP

- Allow managed haying and grazing

- Make CP21 and CP23 eligible on pasture land

- Make CP23 eligible for PIP and SIP

- Base rental payment on fair market value instead of dry land cash rental rate

- Base annual rental payments on practices instead of soil rental rates

- Provide additional incentives to new owner operators

A coordination team to distribute information on the Farm Bill was established and will be led by Jeff Horan.

The Forum was then adjourned.

Participants

Names and contact information on the participants in CREP Forum 2001.



CREP Forum 2001
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